



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Siuslaw National Forest  
Central Coast Ranger District-  
Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area

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The Central Coast Ranger District is preparing an Environmental Analysis (EA) that will analyze and document the effects of the proposed Riparian Thinning Project. This letter is intended to provide all interested parties the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed project prior to completion of the analysis. Your comments can help us identify important issues and determine the extent of analysis needed to make an informed decision on the proposed action.

### **Project Location**

The project area is located in the North Fork Siuslaw watershed northeast of Florence, Oregon (see attached map). The Project area encompasses 22 acres in six separate units and is located in portions of Townships 17 South, Ranges 10 West; Sections 5, 6, and 7, Willamette Meridian; Lane County, Oregon.

### **Need for the Project**

The North Fork Siuslaw River was identified as a Tier 1 priority watershed in the Northwest Forest Plan in recognition of its importance to coho salmon. Most of the high production potential, low gradient habitat occurs on private land, although there is also a section of this habitat within the National Forest. Development of high quality habitat within these areas is dependent on introduction of very large down trees to function as major structural components and habitat-forming features in the floodplain and river channel. Historic stream-side timber harvest, stream cleanout, and splash damming has impacted salmon habitat quality in the North Fork by removing existing and future sources of large down trees.

Over the last 20 years, the Siuslaw National Forest has repeatedly invested in placing wood in the North Fork to restore salmon habitat. From the standpoint of restoring ecosystem function, coho recovery, and economic efficiency, it is desirable for riparian stands to provide large wood to the river naturally. Current management of private lands for pasture and agriculture is likely to continue to limit the growth of very large trees along the stream and floodplain in the downstream reaches. The best opportunity to grow and deliver very large trees and produce the highest quality habitat is within the low gradient reach on National Forest system lands.

The 'placed' instream wood structures in this reach are aging and expected to fail in the next 10 to 20 years. Placed trees average 24 to 36 inches in diameter. Rivers of this size need some larger trees to serve as a base for natural accumulation of smaller, easily transported wood. Larger trees persist longer in the river and serve as more functional anchors for salmon habitat structures. Typical diameter of the old growth trees providing this type of long term core structure in the channel is 48-60 inches in this area. There are currently about 60 large trees per mile within 100 feet of the river in the reach on National Forest lands, but these are largely concentrated in discontinuous pockets of old growth stands. While the number of large trees per



mile is twice that which occurs on private lands above and below the project area, it is only about ¼ of the number of large trees per mile that would be expected to occur in continuous, mature streamside stands in these plant associations.

Streamside vegetation in the North Fork Siuslaw project area lies within the wet western hemlock zone. Alder is often common in the overstory and salmonberry and vine maple occur in the understories, indicating wet conditions. After a major disturbance event such as a wildfire, salmonberry often dominates the regrowth with few conifer trees able to emerge above the brush. Once a conifer tree does break free from the brush their growth is rapid and sustained as there is very little competition for light in these open, low density stands. Tree densities in this vegetation type vary, and representative densities range from 54-124 trees per acre, with large (>30" dbh) trees sometimes comprising 40% of the density.

A number of riparian stands in this area have been altered due to a history of clear-cut harvest and intensive replanting. Dense stocking of the conifers is slowing diameter growth. Average diameter of trees in stream adjacent stands proposed for treatment is 17-19 inches (one unit is 13 inches). Trees falling into the North Fork channel within these areas are not large enough to be stable or accumulate material to form significant habitat features. At current stocking levels, desired densities of trees > 48" diameter will not occur for decades. Thinning these trees can accelerate diameter growth in the residual stand, improving the remaining trees' function when they are recruited to the stream as woody material, and more quickly reestablishing desirable levels of very large trees and large woody material throughout the entire reach of low gradient habitat on the National Forest. The Project is proposed partly in response to problems identified in landscape-scale assessments such as the NF Siuslaw Watershed Analysis and the Late-Successional Reserve Assessment for Oregon's Coast Province – Southern Portion. Based on the problems identified in these and other documents, as well as initial information gathered by the Project's planning team, the following need for the project was identified:

- There is a need to speed development of very large trees to serve as more functional anchors for salmon habitat structures. Reducing competition for light, water, and nutrients within the stand would speed development of very large trees and assist in providing more management and natural opportunities for fish habitat creation and/or improvement that would lead to recovery of full fish habitat function within this key reach, contributing to maintenance and recovery of this at-risk coho stock.

### **Summary of Proposed Actions**

The actions proposed are based on existing known conditions as well as past work of a similar nature. The quantity and type of work may change as the planning team continues to study and develop the proposed action, as feedback is received from the public, partners, and other agencies, and as new or more accurate information becomes available.

- Accelerate the development of very large trees by thinning up to 6 young managed conifer stands (plantations less than 80 years old) totaling about 22 acres in size;
- Use thinning prescriptions in young stands that would leave about 50 to 112 trees/acre after thinning and post-harvest treatments (e.g., snag creation) are accomplished (Stand 703 – 96 to 112 tpa, Stand 107 – 83 to 89 tpa, Stand 702 – 98 to 108 tpa, Stand 703 – 53 to 64 tpa, Stand 705 – 55 to 64 tpa, and Stand 056 – 50 to 70 tpa);

- Provide deadwood habitat for wildlife by creating an average of 4 snags/acre from trees in thinned plantations, and falling and leaving an average of 2 trees/acre in thinned plantations;
- Yard cut trees, less those left for coarse woody material, to landing sites for future use as in-stream structures, personal firewood, or commercial use. This is to mitigate concerns over localized Douglas-fir beetle outbreaks resulting from large concentrations of down wood, increased fire risk associated with high fuel loads along an area of high ignition risk, and aesthetics. As a result, no more than 2 cut trees per acre equal or greater than 14 inches would be left in place.

#### ***Other Proposed Associated Actions***

- Treat residual logging slash on landings and up to 100 feet from County Road 5084. Treatment methods may include directional felling of trees, burning piles, scattering, chipping, or mastication;

#### **How to Comment on the Proposed Project**

Those who are interested in the project are encouraged to become involved in the planning process. Site-specific comments are the most helpful. Comments are requested by July 15, 2015.

Written comments should be submitted to: Michele Jones, District Ranger, c/o Frank Davis, Siuslaw National Forest, 3200 SW Jefferson Way, Corvallis, OR 97331; Fax (541) 750-7234. Comments may be e-mailed to: comments-pacificnorthwest-siuslaw @fs.fed.us. Written comments may also be hand-delivered to the Siuslaw National Forest, 3200 SW Jefferson Way, Corvallis, OR from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding weekends.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the public record for this project and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however we will not be able to provide anonymous commenters with subsequent planning documents related to the project.

#### **Objection Process**

The draft decision for this project will be subject to the pre-decisional objection process for projects and activities implementing land management plans (36 CFR 218). Under this process, members of the public who have participated in the public comment process (during any public participation process throughout project planning), will have the opportunity to have unresolved concerns receive independent review by the Forest Service prior to a final decision being made by the responsible official.

Only individuals or entities (as defined by 36 CFR 218.2) who have submitted timely, specific written comments (as defined by 36 CFR 218.2) regarding this proposed project or activity during this or another public comment period established by the responsible official will be eligible to file an objection. Opportunity for public comment on an Environmental Assessment includes during scoping, the 30 day public review period, or any other instance where the responsible official seeks written comments. Written comments are those submitted to the responsible official or designee during a designated opportunity for public participation provided for a proposed project. Specific written comments should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for

the responsible official to consider.

To receive additional information about the project, please contact Frank N. Davis, Siuslaw National Forest Natural Resource Planner at (541) 750-7077.

Thank you for your interest in the management of the Central Coast Ranger District.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Michele H. Jones*  
MICHELE H. JONES  
District Ranger

Enclosure - Maps